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SUBJECT: FORUM FOR THE FUTURE: MINISTERIAL SESSION ON

KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

¶1. (U) November 12, 2005; 11:00 a.m., Manama, Bahrain.

Kirk Wolcott (notetaker)

¶2. (U) SUMMARY. One of two main components of the second BMENA Forum for the Future, held November 12 in Bahrain, centered on the continuing need to promote knowledge and education throughout the region (the second theme on civil society to be covered septel). During the session, representatives from the G8 and the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA), as well as international organizations and civil society groups, reviewed progress on education initiatives undertaken since last December's inaugural Forum in Morocco. Canada announced its intention to contribute \$50 million Canadian (\$42 million U.S.) to regional reform efforts, including on education, while the European Commission proposed to make education one of its key priorities in the region. Participants covered four broad areas, including the Education Framework for Action, literacy acquisition, vocational training, and the Entrepreneurship Centers planned for Bahrain and Morocco. END SUMMARY.

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Education Framework for Action  
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¶3. (U) Jordan opened the meeting by noting progress made on the Education Framework for Action strategy developed at the May 2005 Dead Sea Ministerial, and calling for additional workshops around the themes of technology, improved teaching standards, and entrepreneurship. Egypt announced it will host a preparatory meeting in Cairo in February, in advance of the next Ministerial scheduled for May in Sharm el-Sheikh. Noting that civil society has an increasing role to play in educational development across the region, Spain announced that it will contribute \$1 million to the newly-created Foundation for the Future to assist in this effort.

¶4. (U) The European Commission said it too will contribute to the Foundation and plans to make education a key priority among its reform efforts. The EC proposed to significantly increase funding for education and vocational training systems so that more BMENA governments can upgrade their education programs. Ahead of the Sharm el-Sheikh Ministerial, the EC plans to sponsor an international conference on education and professional standards toward the goal of providing quality education for all citizens across the region. The Secretary General of the GCC said that peace and stability can only be achieved through education and training, noting that firm political will is necessary to ensure such a development takes place. During the later session on civil society, France asked that the other delegates consider the inclusion of cultural diversity in future BMENA discussions on education, a call that was echoed by Russia during the Forum's closing session.

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Literacy Acquisition  
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¶5. (U) Algeria provided an update on the April meeting on literacy it hosted with Afghanistan, reiterating the call to train 100,000 teachers across the region to provide reading skills for 20 million students by 2015. Toward this end, Algeria proposed the establishment of a regional center to monitor literacy rates, which it also offered to help finance. Afghanistan described recent gains it made in education through its national action plan and stated that the purpose of promoting education in the country is to strengthen the foundation for democracy. Canada announced that it intends to contribute an additional \$50 million Canadian (\$42 million U.S.) through the Canadian International Assistance Agency toward promoting reform in the region in three areas: the private sector, improved governance, and basic education. In addition to the Literacy Initiative it already supports, Canada will contribute toward improving high quality education for all citizens as a means of decreasing the "knowledge deficit" seen in most countries in the region.

Vocational Training

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**16.** (U) Japan provided information from the conference it co-sponsored with Jordan in September, in which more than 100 representatives from 30 countries and international organizations examined ways to improve technical and vocational education and training (TVET) practices in the region. Participants at a TVET task force meeting held November 11 agreed to establish new mechanisms for promoting youth employment, with an emphasis on education for women and girls. The next task force meeting will be held in early 2006, with Egypt and Germany as co-sponsors. Jordan said that the TVET group is now studying ways to build up cooperative models to strengthen education systems, which would include a greater emphasis on public-private partnerships. As a next step, Jordan announced the launch of a database for training centers in the BMENA region to allow for easier cooperation with the EU, UNESCO, and other interested parties. Tunisia spoke about its National Fund for Employment, which has helped 350,000 Tunisians find jobs, and the Tunisian Solidarity Bank, which has granted some 120,000 micro-credits, as examples of success that might be emulated in other countries.

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Entrepreneurship Centers

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**17.** (U) Bahrain reported on developments in its Center for Excellence, one of two Entrepreneurship Centers to have been established following the first Forum last year in Rabat (the second is planned for Morocco). The Bahraini representative said that its center remains in the "teething stage," with a site for the institute having been identified and most of the administrative preparations completed. The first group of students will begin courses in December, to include seminars and workshops designed to increase the competitiveness of young business people in the global economy. Meanwhile, Morocco is still seeking funding before it launches its center.

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